
SOPHOCLES

Oedipus Tyrannus

(OEDIPUS THE KING)

A Translation

by

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Preface

The main reason for this new translation of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the desire to produce a dynamic and powerful version which is as accurate as any non-literal translation can be and which thus reflects as far as any translation can, the spirit of the original.

The original is one of the masterpieces of European literature, and indeed of European civilization - something hardly evident from other translations. Part of the beauty of Sophocles is his direct simplicity of language - and, given the resources of the English language, it is possible to suggest this in a translation without, however, descending to the level of the trite and the banal as most recent translators have done in their attempts to 'modernize' and/or make the story seem 'relevant'.

In the present translation, I have tried to combine a simplicity and directness of expression with a fidelity to the images of the original, as well as rendering as best I could the most important Greek concepts in a Hellenic rather than a modern, abstract, way. As with the original, the language I have employed (or

rather, syntax) is not that of 'everyday' speech. It does, however, achieve the desired simplicity and effect, particularly when spoken.

For this present edition of the translation, I have omitted the Greek notes that formed part of the earlier edition [*Sophocles: Oedipus Tyrannus; A Translation, Interpretation and Commentary* (Thormynd Press, 1991)]. I have also amended the translation in several places, sometimes significantly.

The text used is that of R.D. Dawe - *Sophocles: Trageodiæ; Tom. II* (Teubner, 1979).

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Introduction

For a significant percentage of people who have heard of or read the story of Oedipus, the central theme is the incest of Oedipus with his mother - and then, the killing of his father. The same applies to most of those who read or watch a performance of one of the appalling 'translations' which unfortunately seem to appear with monotonous regularity.

In the majority of interpretations, 'explanations' and translations of and about Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (or 'Oedipus the King') the incest and the patricide are viewed morally, and thus the tragedy becomes a sort of ancient 'morality tale'. In many translations, the impression is given that Oedipus commits a 'sin' by sleeping with his mother and killing his father, and is punished because of it.

This sort of moral interpretation is completely wrong. The essence of this particular Greek tragedy lies in the realm of the gods, with the relationship between individuals, their communities, and the gods. The incest in particular is merely an interesting incident which occurs to a particular mortal and whose importance lies in the realm of prophecy - in what prophecy says about the will of the gods and the fate of mortals. Furthermore, this incest is not viewed with 'horror' by either Oedipus himself or by anyone else - it never described as a 'monstrous deed' or anything of the kind. All Oedipus says about it is that he "should not" have slept with his mother - it was disrespectful (for example qv. v.1184 and v.1441). Even when Oedipus is describing the first time he heard the prophecy that he would sleep with his mother and kill his

father, the tone is quite restrained and definitely not moralistic: "Suffering and strangeness and misery were what his words foresaw: that I must copulate with my mother - and show, for mortals to behold, a family who would not endure..." (vv.790-3). He then goes on to say: "I fled... so that I would never have to face - because of that inauspicious prophecy - the disgrace of its fulfilment.'

The tragedy lies in the fact that Oedipus was not initially disrespectful of the gods - he tried to avoid killing his father, and sleeping with his mother; and when he learns that the oracle at Delphi has said that the plague which is killing the people of Thebes is the result of a defilement which has not been cleaned [the blood is still on a killer's hand] then he is ready to do all that the god says is necessary (vv.95ff.).

What actually occurs is that Oedipus oversteps the proper limits of behaviour *in his quest to find the killer of Laius and discover his own identity*. He begins to act like a 'tyrannus' - a tyrant, an absolute monarch. First, he accuses the blind prophet Tiresias of conspiring against him. Then he accuses his brother-in-law Creon of wanting to overthrow him. Later on, he is dismissive of the warnings of Jocasta and the Shepherd not to enquire further into his origins. He also boasts that he is a child of Fortuna. Oedipus was certain of himself - he knew he had great skill [did he not solve the riddle of the Sphinx?]; he had great strength and courage [did he not by his own hands kill many men when he believed himself attacked (vv.801ff)]; he had power and wealth [was he not King of Thebes?]. All these things, in relation to the power of the gods, mean nothing. As Creon says to him at the very end of the drama: "Do not desire to be master in all things, for you are without the strength which assisted you in your life." It is the gods who have taken away his strength, his skill and his power - as the Chorus say in another Sophoclean tragedy: "Mortals cannot be delivered from the misfortunes of their fate." [Antigone, v.1338]. The tragedy of Oedipus ends with words which summarize all this: "Observe - here is Oedipus, he who understood that famous enigma and was a strong man: what clansman did not behold that fortune without envy? But what a tide of problems have come over him!... Therefore, call no one lucky until, without the pain of injury, they are conveyed beyond life's ending."

Oedipus himself accepts that his troubles were the work of the gods: "It was Apollo - Apollo who brought such troubles to such a troubled ending." (vv.1329-1330). Oedipus goes on to say that his own blindness - which the blind prophet Tiresias had foreseen - was not the work of the gods, but his own handiwork.

The fundamental question which Sophocles poses in this tragedy is voiced by the Chorus when they reply (v.1347) to a request by Oedipus that he be exiled:

"You are as helpless in that resolve as you were in your misfortune." What the tragedy is really explaining, is that however fortunate a person's fate may appear - it is only not only appearance, but also depends on the will of the gods: it can be destroyed in a moment. Therefore, it is wise not to overstep the mark - it is wise not to be excessive; it is wise to observe the customs given by the gods and thus the gods themselves (qv. vv.863ff.). To do otherwise is insolence, disrespect ('hubris') - and invites a retribution by the gods.

Sophocles says of 'hubris' - "Insolence plants the tyrant. There is insolence if by a great foolishness there is a useless over-filling which goes beyond the proper limits. It is an ascending to the steepest and utmost heights and then that hurtling toward that Destiny where the useful foot has no use..." (vv.872ff).

One further point about the *Oedipus Tyrannus* deserves noting, since it has hitherto been mostly ignored. It is the mercy shown by the Shepherd when he is given the infant Oedipus by Laius and Jocasta to leave exposed on the mountain. They have pierced the ankles of the infant Oedipus and fastened them together to make certain he dies. But the Shepherd is merciful and gives the infant to another Shepherd. The consequences of this act of mercy are a sequence of terrible misfortunes which Oedipus, Jocasta and the children of Oedipus suffer - and which, incidently, Creon himself later suffers from (as evident in Sophocles' *Antigone*). Later, after his self-inflicted blinding, Oedipus curses the person who saved him: "May death come to whosoever while roaming those grasslands loosened those cruel fetters..... It was not a favourable deed. For had I died then, no grief such as this would have been caused to either me or my kin." (vv.1349f.). Sophocles clearly states that an act of mercy or compassion can lead to others suffering in the future - and can therefore be unwise.

A Note Regarding v.981-2:

This is one of the crucial lines in understanding how Sophocles - and the Greeks themselves - viewed what we call the 'incest' of Oedipus with his mother (importantly, the Greeks had no word for 'incest'). On a first reading of the Greek text, it gives the impression that what is meant is: "many are the mortals who already - *in dreams also* - have lain with their mothers..." That is, while it is disrespectful and a disgrace, it is nothing to seriously concern oneself with.

Of course, this is far too 'amoral' for most translators and scholars to even consider, and so the line is taken as meaning: "many are the mortals who in

dreams (and also in prophecies) have lain with their mothers..." This sense is rather strained, and not apparent on first reading the Greek.

However, if moral Christianized abstractions are not read into the *Oedipus Tyrannus* - as nearly all previous translators have done, often from laziness and sometimes from misunderstanding what the Greek means - then what emerges, if for purpose of argument we accept the above interpretation, is that the incest may not be that important. Thus, what concerns Oedipus most is his killing of his father - all he says about the incest is that he "should not" have slept with his mother and it is disrespectful (for example, qv. v.1184f and v.1441). What has brought about the plague which is devastating the clan of Thebes, is the killing of Laius. Furthermore, the offender has not given tributes to the gods to clean his hands of the bloodstain (qv. v.1445 - which is often overlooked or misinterpreted). That is, the pollution caused by the killing has not been purified by offerings to the gods - and thus the offender has offended the gods.

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Oedipus Tyrannus

Characters:

Oedipus, King of Thebes

Jocasta, his Consort and wife

Creon, brother of Jocasta

Tiresias, the blind prophet

A Priest, of Zeus

First Messenger

Second Messenger

A Shepherd

Chorus, of Theban Elders

<u>Scene</u>*: Before the wealthy dwelling of Oedipus at Thebes*

Oedipus Tyrannus

OEDIPUS

My children - you most recently reared from ancient Cadmus -
Why do you hasten to these seats
Wreathed in suppliant branches?
Since the citadel is filled with incense,
Chants and lamentations
I did not deem it fitting, my children, to hear
The report of some messenger - so I come here myself:
I, Oedipus the renowned, who is respected by you all.

As you, Elder, are distinguished by nature,

You should speak for these others. Is your manner
One of fear or affection? My will is to assist you
For I would be indifferent to pain
Were I not to have pity after such a supplication as this.

PRIEST

Oedipus, master of my land:
You see how many sit here
Before your altars - some not yet robust enough
To fly far; some heavy as I, Priest of Zeus, with age;
And these, chosen from our unmarried youth.
Enwreathed like them, our people sit in the place of markets,
By the twin shrines of Pallas
And by the embers of the Ismenian oracle.

Our clan, as you yourself behold, already heaves
Too much - its head bent
To the depths bloodily heaving.
Decay is in the unfruitful seeds in the soil,
Decay is in our herds of cattle - our women
Are barren or abort, and that god of fever
Swoops down to strike our clan with an odious plague,
Emptying the abode of Cadmus and giving dark Hades
An abundance of wailing and lamentation.

Not as an equal of the gods do I,
And these children who sit by your altar, behold you -
But as the prime man in our problems of life
And in our dealings and agreements with daimons[1].
You arrived at our town of Cadmus to disentangle us
From the tax we paid to that harsh Songstress -
And that with less than we knew because
Without our experience. Rather - and it is the custom
To say this - you had the support of a god
And so made our lives to prosper.

Thus, Oedipus - you, the most noble of all -
We all as suppliants beseech you
To find us a defence, whether it be from a god's oracle
Or whether it be learnt from some man.
For those who are practical are, by events,
Seen to give counsels which are the most effective.
Most noble among mortals - restore our clan!
But - be cautious. For now this land of yours
Names you their protector for your swiftness before -
Do not let it be recorded of your leadership
That you raised us up again only to let us thereafter fall:
So make us safe, and restore our clan.
Favourable - then - the omens, and prosperity
You brought us: be of the same kind, again!

For, in commanding a land, as you are master of this,
It is much better to be master of men than of an emptiness!
Of no value are a ship or a defensive tower
If they are empty because no men dwell within them.

OEDIPUS

You, my children, who lament - I know, for I am not without knowledge,
Of the desire which brings you here. For well do I see
All your sufferings - and though you suffer, it is I
And not one of you that suffers the most.
For your pain comes to each of you
By itself, with nothing else, while my psyche
Mourns for myself, for you and the clan.
You have not awakened me from a resting sleep
For indeed you should know of my many tears
And the many paths of reflection I have wandered upon and tried.
And, as I pondered, I found one cure
Which I therefore took. The son of Menoeceus,
Creon - he who is my kin by marriage - I have sent to that Pythian dwelling
Of Phoebus to learn how I
By word or deed can give deliverance to the clan.

But I have already measured the duration
And am concerned: for where is he? He is longer than expected
For his absence is, in duration, greater than is necessary.

Yet when he does arrive, it would dishonourable

For me not to act upon all that the gods makes clear.

PRIEST

It is fitting that you spoke thus - for observe that now

We are signalled that Creon is approaching.

OEDIPUS

Lord Apollo! Let our fate be such

That we are saved - and as bright as his face now is!

PRIEST

I conjecture it is pleasing since he arrives with his head crowned

By laurel wreaths bearing many berries.

OEDIPUS

Soon we will know, for, in distance, he can hear us now.

[Enter Creon]

Lord - son of Menoeceus - my kin by marriage:
Give to us the saying you received from the god!

CREON

It is propitious, for I call it fortunate when what is difficult to bear
Is taken from us, enabling us thus to prosper again.

OEDIPUS

But what is it? I am not given more courage
Nor more fear by your words.

CREON

Do you insist upon hearing it here,
Within reach of these others - or shall we go within?

OEDIPUS

Speak it to all. For my concern for their suffering
Is more than even that for my own psyche.

CREON

Then I shall speak to you what I heard from the god.
The command of Lord Phoebus was clear -
That defilement nourished by our soil
Must be driven away, not given nourishment until it cannot be cured.

OEDIPUS

When came this misfortune? How to be cleansed?

CREON

Banishment of a man - or a killing in return for the killing
To release us from the blood and thus this tempest upon our clan.

OEDIPUS

What man is thus fated to be so denounced?

CREON

My Lord, Laius was the Chief
Of this land, before you guided us.

OEDIPUS

That I have heard and know well although I never saw him.

CREON

Because he was slaughtered it is clearly ordered that you

Must punish the killing hands, whosesoever they are.

OEDIPUS

But are they in this land? Can we still find

The now faded marks of the ancient tracks of those so accused?

CREON

Still in our land, he said. What is saught

Can be caught, but will escape if not attended to.

OEDIPUS

Was Laius in his dwelling, in his fields,

Or in another land when he met his death?

CREON

He said he was journeying to a shrine:

But, having gone, he did not return.

OEDIPUS

Was there no messenger, no other with him

Who saw anything and whom we could consult and thus learn from?

CREON

No - killed: all of them. Except one who fled in fear
And so saw nothing except the one thing he did speak of seeing.

OEDIPUS

What? One thing may help us learn many more
And such a small beginning may bring us hope.

CREON

He announced that robbers came upon them and, there being so many,
In their strength slew them with their many hands.

OEDIPUS

How could robbers do that? Unless - unless silver
Was paid to them, from here! Otherwise, they would not have the courage!

CREON

Such was the opinion. But with Laius killed
No one arose to be his avenger since we had other troubles.

OEDIPUS

What troubles were before you that with your King fallen

You were kept from looking?

CREON

The convoluted utterances of the Sphinx made us consider what was before us
And leave unknown what was dark.

OEDIPUS

Then, as a start, I shall go back to make it visible.
It is fitting for Phoebus, and fitting also for you
For the sake of him dead, to return your concern there
And fair that I am seen as an ally
In avenging this land and the god.
Yet not in the name of remote kin
But for myself will I banish the abomination
Since that person who killed may - and soon -
And by his own hand, wish to avenge me.
Thus in this way by so giving aid, I also benefit myself.

Now and swiftly, my children, stand up from these steps -
Raising your suppliant branches -
And go to summon here the people of Cadmus
For I shall do all that is required. Either good fortune -
If the gods wills - will be shown to be ours, or we shall perish.

[Exit Oedipus]

PRIEST

Stand, children, for that favour
For which we came he has announced he will do.
May Phoebus -who delivered this oracle -
Be our Saviour and cause our suffering to cease.

[Exit Priest. Enter Chorus]

CHORUS

Zeus - your pleasing voice has spoken
But in what manner from gold-rich Pytho do you come
To the splendour that is Thebes?

My reason is stretched by dread as fear shakes me -
O Delian Paeon I invoke you! -
And I am in awe. For is this new
Or the continuation of that obligation
Which each season brings again?
Speak to me with your divine voice,
You born from she whom we treasure - our Hope!

You I shall name first - you the daughter of Zeus, the divine Athene!
And then you, her sister, who defends our lands - Artemis! -

Whose illustrious throne is the circle of our market.

And you, Phoebus with your far-reaching arrows!

You - the triad who guard us from death! Appear to me!

When misfortune moved over our clan before

You came to completely drive away that injuring fire -

So now come to us, again!

Beyond count are the injuries I bear

And all my comrades are sick;

There is no spear of thought to defend us -

The offspring of our fertile soil do not grow

While at the birth there are no cries of joy

For the women stretched by their labour:

I behold one after another rushing forth - swifter than feathered birds,

Swifter than invincible fire -

Toward the land of the twilight god!

They are beyond count and make the clan to die:

For her descendants lie unpitied, unmourned on the ground

Condemning others to death

As both the child-less and the mothers gather

Around the base of the altars

To labour as suppliants with their injurious laments

Although clear are the hymns to the Healer

Above those accompanying wailing voices!
In answer, you whom we hold precious - daughter of Zeus -
Send us She of strength with the beautiful eyes!

Grant that fiery Ares - he who fights not with shield of bronze
But who burns as he encircles with his battle-cry -
Turns around to swiftly run back, away from our fatherland
With a fair wind following, to that great Chamber of Amphitrite
Or to that Thracian harbour where strangers are dashed,
Since what he neglects at night
He achieves when day arrives.
Thus - you who carry fire,
Who bestows the power of lighting -
All-father Zeus: waste him beneath your thunder!

Lord Lyceus! From your gold-bound bowstring
I wish you to deal out the hardest of your arrows
So they rise before us as a defence!
And you - Artemis - who by your gleaming light
Rushes through the mountains of Lycia.
And you of the golden mitre whose name
Is that of our land - I invoke you
Ruddied Bacchus with E-U-O-I! -

With your roaming Maenads

Come near to us with your blazing pine-torch

And gleaming eyes, to be our ally

Against that god given no honour by gods!

[Enter Oedipus]

OEDIPUS

You ask and what you ask will come -

For if you in your sickness listen and accept and assist me

You shall receive the strength to lift you out of this trouble.

I here make the declaration even though I am a stranger to that report

And a stranger to that deed. I, myself, would not have delayed

Tracking this, even had there been no signs.

But since it was after these things I became a tax-paying citizen among you citizens,

I proclaim this now to all who are of Cadmus:

Whosoever, concerning Laius son of Labdacus,

Knows the man who killed him

I command him to declare everything to me.

But if he is afraid, he can himself remove the accusation

Against him since what awaits him

Shall not be hostile since he shall pass uninjured to another land.

But if you know of another from another region

Whose hand did it, do not be silent
For I shall reward and confer favours upon you.
But if you keep silent because he is your own kin
Or because you yourself are afraid and so reject this -
Then hear what I of necessity must do.
I forbid that man, whoever he is, to be in this land -
This land where I have power and authority:
No one is to receive him nor speak to him;
Neither is he to share in your offering thanks to the gods,
Nor in the sacrifices or in the libations before them.
Instead, everyone shall push him away - for our defilement
Is, in truth, him: as the Pythian god
By his oracle just now announced to me.

Thus in such a way do I and this god
And the man who was killed become allies -
And so this pact I make concerning he who did that deed
Whether alone or together with others in secret:
Being ignoble, may his miserable life ignobly waste away.
And I also make this pact - that should he arrive at my dwelling
And with my consent stay by my hearth, then may that disease
I desired for those ones come to me!

So I command you to accomplish this
On behalf of me, the god and this land

Now barren, lain waste and without gods.
For even had no god sent you to deal with this matter
It would not have been fitting to leave it uncleaned
For the man killed was both brave and your own lord:
You should have enquired. However, I now have the authority
And hold the command that was his,
And now possess his chambers and his woman - seeded by us both -
And by whom we might have children shared in common had that family
Not had its misfortune and thus there had been a birth:
But it was not to be, for fate bore down upon him.
Thus, I - as if he were my own father -
Will fight for him and will go to any place
To search for and to seize the one whose hand killed
That son of Labdacus - he of Polydorus,
Of Cadmus before that and before then of ancient Agenor.

As to those who do not do this for me, I ask the god
That the seeds they sow in the earth shall not bring forth shoots
Nor their women children, and also that it be their destiny
To be destroyed by this thing - or one that is much worse.
But as for you others, of Cadmus, to whom this is pleasing -
May the goddess, Judgement, who is on our side,
And all of the gods, be with us forever.

CHORUS

Bound by your oath, my Lord, I speak:
I am not the killer - nor can I point out he who did the killing.
It is he who sent us on this search -
Phoebus - who should say who did that work.

OEDIPUS

That would be fair. But to compel the gods
Against their will is not within the power of any man.

CHORUS

Shall I speak of what I consider is the second best thing to do?

OEDIPUS

Do not neglect to explain to me even what is third!

CHORUS

He who sees the most of what Lord Phoebus knows
Is Lord Tiresias - and it is from his watching, and clearness,
My Lord, that we might learn the most.

OEDIPUS

I have not been inactive in attending to that:
Since Creon spoke of it, I have sent two escorts -
And it is a wonder after this long why he is not here.

CHORUS

What can still be told of those things is blunt from age.

OEDIPUS

What is there? For I am watching for any report.

CHORUS

It was said that he was killed by travellers.

OEDIPUS

That I have heard - but no one sees here he who observed that.

CHORUS

But he will have had his share of fear
Having heard your pact - and will not have stayed here.

OEDIPUS

And he who had no fear of the deed? Would such a one fear such words?

CHORUS

But here is he who can identify him. For observe,

It is the prophet of the god who is led here:

He who of all mortals has the most ability to reveal things.

[Enter Tiresias, guided by a boy]

OEDIPUS

Tiresias - you who are learned in all things: what can be taught; what is never spoken of;

What is in the heavens and what treads on the earth -

Although you have no sight, can you see how our clan

Has given hospitality to sickness? You are our shield,

Our protector - for you, Lord, are the only remedy we have.

Phoebus - if you have not heard it from the messengers -

Sent us as answer to our sending: release from the sickness

Will come only if we are skilled enough to discover who killed Laius

And kill them or drive them away from this land as fugitives.

Therefore, do not deny to us from envy the speech of birds

Or any other way of divination which you have,

But pull yourself and this clan - and me -

Pull us away from all that is defiled by those who lie slain.

Our being depends on you. For if a man assists someone

When he has the strength to do so, then it is a noble labour.

TIRESIAS

Ah! There is harm in judging when there is no advantage
In such a judgement. This I usefully understood
But then totally lost. I should not have come here.

OEDIPUS

What is this? Are you heartless, entering here so?

TIRESIAS

Permit me to return to my dwelling. Easier then will it be
For you to carry what is yours, and I what is mine, if you are persuaded in this.

OEDIPUS

Such talk is unusual because unfriendly toward this clan
Which nourishes you: will you deprive us of oracles?

TIRESIAS

Yes - for I know that the words you say
Are not suitable. And I will not suffer because of mine.

OEDIPUS

Before the gods! Turn aside that judgement! Here, before you,

All of us are as humble suppliants!

TIRESIAS

Since all of you lack judgement, I will not speak either about myself

Or you and so tell about defects.

OEDIPUS

What? If you are aware of it but will not speak,

Do you intend to betray and so totally destroy your clan?

TIRESIAS

I will not cause pain to either you or myself. Therefore,

Why these aimless rebukes since I will not answer.

OEDIPUS

Not...? Why, you ignoble, worthless...! A rock,

By its nature, can cause anger. Speak it! -

Or will you show there is no end to your hardness?

TIRESIAS

You rebuke me for anger - but it is with you

That she dwells, although you do not see this and blame me instead.

OEDIPUS

And whose being would not have anger
Hearing how you dishonour our clan!

TIRESIAS

By themselves, these things will arrive - even though my silence covers them.

OEDIPUS

Then since they shall arrive, you must speak to me about them!

TIRESIAS

Beyond this, I explain nothing. But if it is your will,
Become savage with wroth in anger.

OEDIPUS

Yes indeed I will yield to the anger possessing me
Since I do understand! For I know you appear to me
To have worked together with others to produce that deed,
Although it was not your hand that did the killing. But - had you sight -
I would say that the blow was yours and yours alone!

TIRESIAS

Is that so! I declare it is to the proclamation

You announced that you must adhere to, so that from this day

You should not speak to me or these others

Since you are the unhealthy pollution in our soil!

OEDIPUS

It is disrespectful to bound forth

With such speech! Do you believe you will escape?

TIRESIAS

I have escaped. For, by my revelations, I am nourished and made strong.

OEDIPUS

Where was your instruction from? Certainly not from your craft!

TIRESIAS

From you - for against my desire I cast out those words.

OEDIPUS

What words? Say them again so I can fully understand.

TIRESIAS

Did you not hear them before? Or are your words a test?

OEDIPUS

They expressed no meaning to me. Say them again.

TIRESIAS

I said you are the killer and thus the man you seek.

OEDIPUS

You shall not escape if you injure me so again!

TIRESIAS

Shall I then say more to make your anger greater?

OEDIPUS

As much as you desire for you are mistaken in what you say.

TIRESIAS

I say that with those nearest to you are you concealed
In disrespectful intimacy, not seeing the trouble you are in.

OEDIPUS

Do you believe you can continue to speak so and remain healthy?

TIRESIAS

Yes, if revelations have power.

OEDIPUS

They do for others, but not for you! They have none for you
Because you are blind in your ears, in your purpose as well as in your eyes!

TIRESIAS

In faulting me for that you are unfortunate
Because soon there will be no one who does not find fault with you.

OEDIPUS

You are nourished by night alone! It is not for me,
Or anyone here who sees by the light, to injure you.

TIRESIAS

It is not my destiny to be defeated by you -
Apollo is sufficient for that, since it is his duty to obtain vengeance.

OEDIPUS

Were those things Creon's inventions - or yours?

TIRESIAS

It is not Creon who harms you - it is yourself.

OEDIPUS

Ah! Wealth, Kingship and that art of arts
Which surpasses others - these, in life, are envied:
And great is the jealousy cherished because of you.
It is because of this authority of mine - which this clan
Gave into my hands, unasked -
That the faithful Creon, a comrade from the beginning,
Desires to furtively creep about to overthrow me
And hires this performing wizard,
This cunning mendicant priest who sees only
For gain but who is blind in his art!

So now tell me: where and when have you given clear divinations?
For you did not - when that bitch was here chanting her verses -
Speak out and so give deliverance to your clansfolk.
Yet her enigma was not really for some passing man
To disclose since it required a prophet's art:
But your augury foretold nothing and neither did you learn anything
From any god! It was I who came along -
I, Oedipus, who sees nothing! - I who put and end to her
By happening to use reason rather than a knowledge of augury.
Now it is me you are trying to exile since your purpose

Is to stand beside the throne among Creon's supporters.

But I intend to make you sorry! Both of you - who worked together

To drive me out. And if I did not respect you as an Elder,

Pain would teach you a kind of judgement!

CHORUS

Yet I suspect that he has spoken

In anger, as I believe you did, Oedipus.

But this is not what is needed. Instead, it is the god's oracle

That will, if examined, give us the best remedy.

TIRESIAS

Though you are the King, I have at least an equality of words

In return, for I also have authority.

I do not live as your servant - but for Loxias -

Just as I am not inscribed on the roll as being under Creon's patronage.

Thus, I speak for myself - since you have found fault with me because I am blind.

When you look, you do not see the trouble you are in,

Nor where you dwell, nor who you are intimate with.

Do you know from whom your being arose? Though concealed, you are the enemy

Of your own, below and upon this land:

On both sides beaten by your mother and your father

To be driven out from this land by a swift and angry Fury -

And you who now see straight will then be in darkness.

What place will not be a haven for your cries?

What Cithaeron will not, and soon, resound with them

When you understand your wedding-night in that abode

Into where you fatefully and easily sailed but which is no haven from your voyage?

Nor do you understand the multitude of troubles

Which will make you equal with yourself and your children.

Thus it is, so therefore at my mouth and at Creon's

Throw your dirt! For there is no other mortal whose being

Will be so completely overwhelmed by troubles as yours.

OEDIPUS

Am I to endure hearing such things from him?

May misfortune come to you! Go from here - without delay!

Away from my dwelling! Turn and go!

TIRESIAS

I would not have come here, had you not invited me.

OEDIPUS

I did not know you would speak nonsense

Or I would have been unwilling to ask you here to my dwelling.

TIRESIAS

So you believe I was born lacking sense?

Yet I made sense to those who gave you birth.

OEDIPUS

What? Wait! Which mortals gave me birth?

TIRESIAS

It is on this day that you are born and also destroyed.

OEDIPUS

All that you have said is enigmatic or lacking in reason.

TIRESIAS

But are you not the best among us in working things out?

OEDIPUS

Do you find fault with what I have discovered is my strength?

TIRESIAS

It is that very fortune which has totally ruined you.

OEDIPUS

I am not concerned - if I have preserved this clan.

TIRESIAS

Then I shall depart. You - boy! Lead me away.

OEDIPUS

Let him lead you away. While here, you are under my feet
And annoy me. When gone - you will give me no more pain.

TIRESIAS

I shall go but speak that for which I was fetched, with no dread
Because of your countenance. For you cannot harm me.
I say that the man you have long searched for
And threatened and made proclamation about for the killing
Of Laius - he is present, here.
Although called a foreigner among us, he will be exposed as a native
Of Thebes but have no delight in that event.
Blind, though recently able to see -
And a beggar, who before was rich - he shall go to foreign lands
With a stick to guide him along the ground on his journey.
And he shall be exposed to his children as both their father
And their brother; to the woman who gave him birth
As both her son and husband; and to his father

As his killer who seeded her after him. So go
Within to reason this out and if you catch me deceiving you,
Then say that in my prophecies there is nothing for me to be proud of.

[Exit Tiresias and Oedipus]

CHORUS

Who is the one that the god-inspired oracle-stone at Delphi saw
With bloody hands doing that which it is forbidden to speak of?
For now is the day for him to move his feet swifter
Than storm's horses as he flees
Since the son of Zeus - armed with fire and lightning -
Is leaping toward him
Accompanied by those angry
And infallible Furies!

It was not that long ago that the omen shone forth
From the snows of Parnassus: Search everywhere for that man who is concealed;
He who wanders up to the wild-woods,
Through caves and among the rocks like some bull -
He unlucky in his desolation who by his unlucky feet
Seeks to elude that prophecy from the Temple at the centre of the world -
That living doom which circles around him.

There is a strange wonder - wrought by he who is skilled in augury;

I cannot believe, yet cannot disbelieve, nor explain my confusion
For fear hovers over me. I cannot see what is here, or what is behind!
Yet - if there was between the family of Labdacus,
And that son of Polybus, any strife existing
Either now or before, I have not learned of it
To thus use it as proof to examine by trial and thus attack
The public reputation of Oedipus, becoming thus for the family of Labdacus
Their ally in respect of that killing which has been concealed.

Rather - this is for Zeus and Apollo, who have the skill
To understand, although that other man has won more
For his discoveries than I.
Even so, on some things nothing decisive is discovered:
As in learning, where by learning
One man may overtake another.
Thus not before I see that they who accuse him are speaking straight
Will I declare myself for them
For she was visible - that winged girl who came down against him -
And we then saw proof of his knowledge, which was beneficial to our clan.
So therefore my decision is not to condemn him as ignoble.

[Enter Creon]

CREON

Clansmen! Having learnt of a horrible accusation

Made against me by Oedipus the King
I hastened here! If, in these our troubles,
He deems that he has suffered because of me -
Been injured by some word or some deed -
Then I would have no desire to live as long as I might
Having to bear such talk! For it is not simple -
The damage that would be done to me by such words:
Rather, it would be great, for I would be dishonoured before my clan -
With you and my kinsfolk hearing my name dishonoured.

CHORUS

That insult perhaps came forth because of anger -
Rather than being a conclusion from reason.

CREON

And it was declared that it was my reasoning
Which persuaded the prophet to utter false words?

CHORUS

It was voiced - but I do not know for what reason.

CREON

Were his eyes straight, was he thinking straight
When he made that allegation against me?

CHORUS

I do not know. For I do not observe what my superiors do.

But here, from out of his dwelling, comes the Chief himself.

[Enter Oedipus]

OEDIPUS

You there! Why are you here? Have you so much face

That you dare to come to my home?

You - the one exposed as the killer of its man

And, vividly, as a robber seeking my Kingship!

In the name of the gods, tell me if it was cowardice or stupidity

That you saw in me when you resolved to undertake this!

Did you reason that I would not observe your cunning treachery -

Or, if I did learn of it, I would not defend myself?

Instead, it was senseless of you to set your hand to this -

With no crowd or comrades - and go in pursuit of authority:

That which is captured by using wealth and the crowd!

CREON

You know what you must do - in answer to your words

Be as long in hearing my reply so that you can, with knowledge, judge for yourself.

OEDIPUS

Your words are clever - but I would be mistaken to learn from you,
Since I have found how dangerous and hostile you are to me.

CREON

That is the first thing you should hear me speak about.

OEDIPUS

Do not tell me: it is that you are *not* a traitor!

CREON

If you believe that what is valuable is pride, by itself,
Without a purpose, then your judgement is not right.

OEDIPUS

And if you believe you can betray a kinsman
And escape without punishment, then your judgement is no good.

CREON

I agree that such a thing is correct -
So inform me what injury you say I have inflicted.

OEDIPUS

Did you convince me or did you not convince me that I should
Send a man to bring here that respected prophet?

CREON

I am the same person now as the one who gave that advice.

OEDIPUS

How long is the duration since Laius -

CREON

Since he did what? I do not understand.

OEDIPUS

Since he disappeared: removed by deadly force?

CREON

The measurement of that duration is great - far into the past.

OEDIPUS

So - was that prophet then at his art?

CREON

Yes: of equal skill and having the same respect as now.

OEDIPUS

At that period did he make mention of me?

CREON

Certainly not to me nor when I was standing nearby.

OEDIPUS

Was there no inquiry held about the killing?

CREON

It was indeed undertaken, although nothing was learned.

OEDIPUS

So why did that clever person not speak, then?

CREON

I do not know. And about things I cannot judge for myself, I prefer to be silent.

OEDIPUS

But you do know why and would say it if you had good judgement!

CREON

What? If I did know, then I would not deny it.

OEDIPUS

It is that if he had not met with you,
He would not have spoken about "my" killing of Laius.

CREON

You should know if he indeed said that.
Now, however, it is fair that I question you just as you have me.

OEDIPUS

Question me well - for you will never convict me as the killer!

CREON

Nevertheless. You had my sister - took her as wife?

OEDIPUS

That is an assertion that cannot be denied.

CREON

Does she, in this land, possess an authority the equal of yours?

OEDIPUS

Whatsoever is her wish, she obtains from me.

CREON

And am I - who completes the triad - not the equal of you both?

OEDIPUS

And it because of that, that you are exposed as a traitor to your kin!

CREON

No! For consider these reasons for yourself, as I have,

Examining this first: do you believe anyone

Would prefer authority with all its problems

To untroubled calm if they retained the same superiority?

I myself do not nurture such a desire

To be King rather than do the deeds of a King:

No one commanding good judgement would, whoever they were.

Now, and from you, I receive everything with no problems

But if the authority was mine, I would have to do many things against my nature.

How then could being a King bring me more pleasure

Than the trouble-free authority and power I have?
I am not yet so much deceived
As to want honours other than those which profit me.
Now, I greet everyone, and now, everyone bids me well
Just as, now, those who want something from you call upon me
Since only in that way can they possibly have success.
Why, then, would I let go of these to accept that?

A traitor cannot, because of his way of thinking, have good judgement.
I am not a lover of those whose nature is to reason so
And would not endure them if they did act.
As proof of this, first go yourself to Pytho
To inquire whether the message I brought from the oracle there was true
And if you detect that I and that interpreter of signs
Plotted together, then kill me - not because of a single vote,
But because of two, for you will receive mine as well as yours.
I should not be accused because of unclear reasoning and that alone.

It is not fair when the ignoble, rashly,
Are esteemed as worthy or the worthy as ignoble.
I say that to cast away an honourable friend is to do the same
To that which is with life and which you cherish the most.
It takes a while for an intuition to be made steady
For it is only after a while that a man shows if he is fair
Although an ignoble one is known as such in a day.

CHORUS

Honourable words from someone cautious of falling,

My Lord. Those swift in their judgement are unsteady.

OEDIPUS

But when there is a plot against me which is swiftly and furtively

Moving forward, then I must be swift in opposing that plot

Since if I remain at rest, then indeed

What is about to be done, will be - because of my mistake.

CREON

Then you still desire to cast me from this land?

OEDIPUS

Not so! It is your death, not your exile, that I want!

CREON

When you explain to me what is the nature of this thing "envy" -

OEDIPUS

You speak without yielding and not in good faith!

CREON

Is it not your 'good judgement' that is keenly being observed?

OEDIPUS

But at least it is mine!

CREON

And for that very reason it is but the equal of mine.

OEDIPUS

But you have a treacherous nature!

CREON

But if nothing has been proved -

OEDIPUS

Even so, there must be authority.

CREON

Not when that authority is defective.

OEDIPUS

My clan! My clan!

CREON

A portion of the clan is for me - not wholly for you!

CHORUS

My Lords, stop this! It is fortunate perhaps that I observe
Jocasta approaching from her dwelling, since it is fitting for her
To make right the quarrel which now excites you.

[Enter Jocasta]

JOCASTA

You wretches! Why this ill-advised strife
Produced by your tongues? Are you not dishonoured - when this land
Is suffering - by becoming moved by personal troubles?
You should go within; while you, Creon, should go to your dwelling
So as not to let what is only nothing become a great sorrow.

CREON

My kin by blood! It is horrible what your husband Oedipus,
From two unfair things, has decided it is right to do!

To push me from this land of my ancestors - or to seize and kill me!

OEDIPUS

Yes! For he was, my lady, caught trying to injure

My person by a cowardly art.

CREON *[looking upward]*

Deny me, this day, your assistance - curse and destroy me

If I committed that which I am accused of doing!

JOCASTA

Before the god, trust him, Oedipus!

Chiefly because of this oath to the god

And then because of me and these others here beside you.

CHORUS

My Lord - be persuaded, having agreed to reflect on this.

OEDIPUS

To what do you wish me to yield?

CHORUS

Respect he who before has never been weak - he now strengthened by that oath.

OEDIPUS

Do you know what it is that you so desire?

CHORUS

I do know.

OEDIPUS

Then explain what you believe it to be.

CHORUS

When a comrade is under oath, you should never accuse him
Because of unproved rumours and brand him as being without honour.

OEDIPUS

Then attend to this well. When you seek this, it is my
Destruction that is saught - or exile from this land.

CHORUS

No! By the god who is Chief of all the gods -
Helios! Bereft of gods, bereft of kin - may the extremist death
Of all be mine if such a judgement was ever mine!
But ill-fated would be my breath of life - which the decay in this soil
Already wears down - if to those troubles of old

There was joined this trouble between you and him.

OEDIPUS

Then allow him to go - although it requires my certain death

Or that I, without honour and by force, am thrown out from this land.

And it is because of you, not because of him - the mercy coming from your mouth -

That I do this. As for him - wherever he goes - I will detest him!

CREON

It is clear that you are hostile as you yield - and so dangerous, even though

Your anger has gone. For natures such as yours

Are deservedly painful to whose who endure them.

OEDIPUS

Then go away and leave me.

CREON

I shall depart. To you, I remain unknown - but to these, here, I am the same.

[Exit Creon]

CHORUS

My Lady - why do you delay in returning with him into your dwelling?

JOCASTA

Because I wish to learn what has happened.

CHORUS

Suspicion arising from unreasonable talk - and a wounding that was unfair.

JOCASTA

From both of them?

CHORUS

Indeed.

JOCASTA

What was the talk?

CHORUS

Too much for me, too much for this land, wearied before this.

Since it appears to have ceased, here - let it remain so.

OEDIPUS

Observe where you have come to with your prowess in reason
By me giving way and blunting my passion!

CHORUS

My Lord, I will not say this only this once:
My judgement would be defective - and by my purposeless judgements
Would be shown to be so - if I deserted you,
You who when this land I love was afflicted
And despairing, set her straight.
Now be for us our lucky escort, again!

JOCASTA

My Lord - before the god explain to me
What act roused such wroth and made you hold onto it.

OEDIPUS

It will be told. For I respect you, my lady, more than them.
It was Creon - the plot he had against me.

JOCASTA

Then speak about it - if you can clearly affix blame for the quarrel.

OEDIPUS

He declared that it was me who had killed Laius.

JOCASTA

Did he see it, for himself - or learn of it from someone?

OEDIPUS

It was rather that he let that treacherous prophet bring it -
So as to make his own mouth entirely exempt.

JOCASTA

Therefore, and this day, acquit yourself of what was spoken about
And listen to me, for you will learn for yourself
That no mortal is given the skill to make prophecies.

I bring to light evidence for this:
An oracle came to Laius once - not I say
From Phoebus himself but from a servant -
That his own death was destined to come from a child
Which he and I would produce.
But - as it was reported - one day foreign robbers
Slew him where three cart-tracks meet.

As to the child - his growth had not extended to the third day
When we yoked the joints of its feet
And threw it - by another's hand - upon a desolate mountain.

So, in those days, Apollo did not bring about, for him,
That he slay the father who begot him - nor, for Laius,
That horror which he feared - being killed by his son.
Such were the limits set by those words of revelation!
Therefore, do not concern yourself with them: for what a god
Wants others to find out, he will by himself unmistakably reveal.

OEDIPUS

As I heard you just now my lady,
My judgement became muddled as the breath of life left me.

JOCASTA

What has so divided you that you turn away to speak?

OEDIPUS

I believed I heard this from you - that Laius
Was killed near where three cart-tracks meet.

JOCASTA

It was, indeed, voiced - and is so, still.

OEDIPUS

Where is the place where came his misfortune?

JOCASTA

The nearby land of Phocis - where the track splits
To come from Delphi and from Daulia.

OEDIPUS

How many seasons have passed since that thing was done?

JOCASTA

It was just before you held this land's authority
That it was revealed by a herald to the clan.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus! What was your purpose in doing this to me?

JOCASTA

What is it that burdens your heart, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS

Do not enquire yet; rather, explain to me the appearance Laius had:
Was he at the height of his vigour?

JOCASTA

He was big - his head covered in hair but having a recent whiteness.
His build was not far removed from your own.

OEDIPUS

Wretch that I am! For it seems that over myself
I, without looking, threw that terrible curse!

JOCASTA

What are you saying? My Lord - I tremble as I look at you.

OEDIPUS

My courage is replaced by fear - that the prophet possesses sight!
More can be explained - if you make known one more thing.

JOCASTA

Though I still tremble, if I have knowledge of what you ask, I shall speak it.

OEDIPUS

Did he have a slender one - or did he have many men
As escort as befits a warrior chieftain?

JOCASTA

Altogether there were five, one of those being an official -
And one carriage, which conveyed Laius.

OEDIPUS

Now it becomes visible. But who was he,
My lady, who gave you that report?

JOCASTA

A servant - the very person who alone returned, having escaped harm.

OEDIPUS

Then perhaps he is to be found, at this moment, within our dwelling?

JOCASTA

Definitely not. For as soon as he returned here again and saw you
Were the master of what the dead Laius had held,

He beseeched me - his hand touching mine -
To send him away to the wilds as a shepherd to a herd,
Far away where he could not see the town.
And so I sent him. For I deemed him worthy,
As a slave, to have a greater reward than that favour.

OEDIPUS

Then swiftly - and with no delay - can he be returned here?

JOCASTA

He is around. But why do you desire it?

OEDIPUS

I fear, my lady, that far too much has already
Been said by me. Yet it is my wish to see him.

JOCASTA

Then he shall be here. But it merits me to learn,
My Lord, what burden within you is so difficult to bear.

OEDIPUS

I shall not deprive you of that - for what I fear
Comes closer. Who is more important to me than you
To whom I would speak when going through such an event as this?

Polybus the Corinthian was my father -
And the Dorian, Meropè, my mother. I was, in merit,
Greater than the clansfolk there - until I was, by chance,
Attacked. This, for me, was worthy of my wonder

Although unworthy of my zeal:
At a feast a man overfull with wine
Mumbled into his chalice what I was falsely said to be my father's.
I was annoyed by this during that day - scarcely able
To hold myself back. On the one following that, I saught to question
My mother and father, and they were indignant
At he who had let loose those words at me.
Because of this, I was glad, although I came to itch from them
For much did they slither about.
So, unobserved by my mother and father, I travelled
To Pytho. But for that which I had come, Phoebus there
Did not honour me; instead - suffering and strangeness
And misery were what his words foresaw:
That I must copulate with my mother - and show,
For mortals to behold, a family who would not endure -
And also be the killer of the father who planted me.

I, after hearing this - and regarding Corinth -
Thereafter by the stars measured the ground
I fled upon so that I would never have to face -
Because of that inauspicious prophecy - the disgrace of its fulfilment.
And while so travelling I arrived in those regions
Where you spoke of the King himself being killed.

For you, my lady, I shall declare what has not been spoken of before.

While journeying, I came near to that three-fold track,
And at that place an official and a carriage
With young horse with a man mounted in it - such as you spoke of -
Came toward me. And he who was in front as well as the Elder himself
Were for driving me vigorously from the path.
But the one who had pushed me aside - the carriage driver -
I hit in anger: and the Elder, observing this
From his chariot, watched for me to go past and then on the middle
Of my head struck me with his forked goad.
He was certainly repaid with more! By a quick blow
From the staff in this, my hand, he fell back
From the middle of the carriage and rolled straight out!
And then I destroyed all the others. Yet if to that stranger
And Laius there belongs a common relation
Then who exists who is now as unfortunate as this man, here?
Who of our race of mortals would have a daimon more hostile -
He to whom it is not permitted for a stranger nor a clansman
To receive into their homes, nor even speak to -
But who, instead, must be pushed aside? And it is such things as these -
These curses! - that I have brought upon myself.

The wife of he who is dead has been stained by these hands
Which killed him. Was I born ignoble?
Am I not wholly unclean? For I must be exiled
And in my exile never see my family

Nor step into my own fatherland - or by marriage
I will be yoked to my mother and slay my father
Polybus, he who produced and nourished me.
And would not someone who decided a savage daimon
Did these things to me be speaking correctly?

You awesome, powerful, gods -
May I never see that day! May I go away
From mortals, unobserved, before I see
The stain of that misfortune come to me.

CHORUS

I also, my Lord, would wish to draw away from such things.
But surely until you learn from he who was there, you can have expectations?

OEDIPUS

Indeed. There is for me just such an expectation,
And one alone - to wait for that herdsman.

JOCASTA

And when he does appear, what is your intent?

OEDIPUS

I will explain it to you. If his report is found to be
The same as yours, then I shall escape that suffering.

JOCASTA

Did you then hear something odd in my report?

OEDIPUS

You said he spoke of men - of robbers - being the ones
Who did the killing. If, therefore, he still
Speaks of there being many of them, then I am not the killer
For one cannot be the same as the many of that kind.
But if he says a solitary armed traveller, then it is clear,
And points to me as the person who did that work.

JOCASTA

You should know that it was announced in that way.
He cannot go back and cast them away
For they were heard, here, by the clan - not just by me.
Yet even if he turns away from his former report,
Never, my Lord, can the death of Laius
Be revealed as a straight fit - for it was Loxias

Who disclosed he would be killed by the hand of my child.

But he - the unlucky one - could not have slain him

For he was himself destroyed before that.

Since then I have not by divination looked into

What is on either side of what is next.

OEDIPUS

I find that pleasing. However, that hired hand

Should be summoned here by sending someone - it should not be neglected.

JOCASTA

I will send someone, and swiftly. But let us go into our dwelling.

I would not do anything that would be disagreeable to you.

[Exit Oedipus and Jocasta]

CHORUS

May the goddess of destiny be with me

So that I bear an entirely honourable attitude

In what I say and in what I do -

As set forth above us in those customs born and
Given their being in the brightness of the heavens
And fathered only by Olympus.
For they were not brought forth by mortals,
Whose nature is to die. Not for them the lethargy
Of laying down to sleep
Since the god within them is strong, and never grows old.

Insolence plants the tyrant:
There is insolence if by a great foolishness
There is a useless over-filling which goes beyond
The proper limits -
It is an ascending to the steepest and utmost heights
And then that hurtling toward that Destiny
Where the useful foot has no use.
Yet since it is good for a clan to have combat,
I ask the god never to deliver us from it:
As may I never cease from having the god for my champion.

If someone goes forth and by his speaking
Or the deeds of his hands looks down upon others
With no fear of the goddess Judgement and not in awe
Of daimons appearing,
Then may he be seized by a destructive Fate
Because of his unlucky weakness.

If he does not gain what he gains fairly,
Does not keep himself from being disrespectful,
And in his foolishness holds onto what should not be touched,
Then how will such a man thereafter keep away those arrows of anger
Which will take revenge on his breath of life?
For if such actions are those are esteemed,
Is this my respectful choral-dance required?

No more would I go in awe to that never to be touched sacred-stone,
Nor to that Temple at Abae,
Nor Olympia - if those prophecies do not fit
In such a way that all mortals can point it out.
But you whom it is right to call my master -
Zeus! - you who rule over everyone: do not forget this,
You whose authority is, forever, immortal.
For they begin to decay - those prophecies of Laius
Given long ago, and are even now set aside
And nowhere does Apollo become manifest because esteemed:
For the rituals of the gods are being lost.

[Enter Jocasta]

JOCASTA

Lords of this land - the belief has been given to me
That I should go to the Temples of our guardian gods, my hands

Holding a garland and an offering of incense.
For Oedipus lets his breath of life be too much possessed by his heart
Because of all his afflictions - since, unlike a man who reasons
And determines the limits of what is strange by the past,
He is fearful when someone, in speaking, speaks of such things.

Therefore, since none of my counsels have achieved anything,
I come here - to you, Lycean Apollo, since you are close to us -
To petition you by asking you with these my gifts
That we are cleansed of defilement by you bringing us deliverance.
For now all of us are afraid as we behold
That he who is guiding our vessel is wounded.

[Enter Messenger]

MESSENGER

Is it from you, stranger, that I might learn where
Is the dwelling of King Oedipus:
Or, more particularly, if you have knowledge of where he himself is?

CHORUS

Here are his chambers, stranger, and he himself is within.
But here is his wife and mother of his children.

MESSENGER

May she always prosper in her prospering descent
Since by them her marriage is complete.

JOCASTA

And may you, also, stranger, because of your worthy eloquence.
But explain to me what you seek in arriving here
Or what it is that you wish to make known.

MESSENGER

What is profitable, my lady, for both your family and your husband.

JOCASTA

What is it? And who sent you here, to us?

MESSENGER

I am from Corinth. And when, presently, I have said my speech,
There will be joy - of that I have no doubt - but also an equal sorrowing.

JOCASTA

How can that be? What has a double strength that it could cause that?

MESSENGER

He, as their King: for they who inhabit the land
Of Isthmia would make him so - so they have said.

JOCASTA

How is that? For is not Polybus, the Elder, their Master?

MESSENGER

Not now - because death holds him in a tomb.

JOCASTA

What are you saying? That the father of Oedipus - has died?

MESSENGER

Is my report is not correct, then I merit death.

JOCASTA

Swiftly - my handmaiden - go to your master
To tell him this. You prophecies from the gods! -
Where is your reality? This was the man whom Oedipus long ago from fear
Avoided lest he kill him. And now it is because
Of his own destiny that he died rather than through that of another.

[Enter Oedipus]

OEDIPUS

My Lady, Jocasta:

Why did you summon me here from my chamber?

JOCASTA

Hear this man and, as you listen, watch to where

It is that those solemn prophecies of the gods lead.

OEDIPUS

What report has he - wherever he is from - for me?

JOCASTA

He is from Corinth with the message that your father

Polybus is no more - he is dead.

OEDIPUS

Then announce it, stranger - leading it out yourself, old one.

MESSENGER

If that is what I must relate first and clearly

Then know well that his death has come upon him.

OEDIPUS

Was it by treachery - or by dealing with sickness?

MESSENGER

A small turn downwards, and the ageing body lies in sleep.

OEDIPUS

Am I to assume that he unfortunately perished from a sickness?

MESSENGER

Indeed - for he had been allocated a great many seasons.

OEDIPUS

Ah! Then why, my lady, look toward
The altar of some Pythian prophet, or above to those
Screeching birds - whose guidance was that I would
Assuredly kill my father? But he is dead
And hidden within the earth, while I am here
Without having to clean my spear. Unless - it was a longing for me
Which destroyed him, and thus he is dead because of me.
But then - that divine prophecy has been, by that circumstance, taken away
By Polybus lying in Hades, and thus has no importance.

JOCASTA

Did I not declare such things to you, just now?

OEDIPUS

Such was said - but I turned away because of my fear of them.

JOCASTA

Do not anymore wound your heart by such things.

OEDIPUS

But how can I not distance myself from that intercourse with my mother?

JOCASTA

What is there for mortals to fear, for it is chance
Which rules over them, and who can clearly foresee what does not exist?
It is most excellent to live without a plan - according to one's ability.
You should not fear being married to your mother:
For many are the mortals who have - in dreams also[2] -
Lain with their mothers, and he to whom such things as these
Are as nothing, provides himself with a much easier life.

OEDIPUS

All that you expressed is fine, except for this:

She who gave me birth is alive, and since she is now still living,

It is necessary that I - despite your fine words - distance myself from her.

JOCASTA

Yet the death of your father is a great revelation for you.

OEDIPUS

Yes - a great one. But I fear she who is living.

MESSENGER

Who is this woman that you so fear?

OEDIPUS

Meropè, old one: she who belonged with Polybus.

MESSENGER

And what, concerning her, could produce fear in you?

OEDIPUS

A strange god-inspired prophecy.

MESSENGER

Is it forbidden for someone else to know - or can it be told?

OEDIPUS

Certainly. Once, Loxias said to me
That I must copulate with my own mother
And by my own hands take my father's blood.
Therefore, and long ago, I left Corinth
And have kept far away from there. And good fortune has been mine,
Although it is very pleasing to behold the eye's of one's parents.

MESSENGER

Was that what distanced you from your clan?

OEDIPUS

Yes, old one: I did not want to slaughter my father.

MESSENGER

Then why, my Lord, have I not released you from that fear -
Since I came here as a favour to you?

OEDIPUS

Certainly you would merit receiving a reward from me.

MESSENGER

And that was chiefly why I came here -

That on your arrival home I would obtain something useful.

OEDIPUS

But I will not rejoin those who planted me.

MESSENGER

My son! It is clearly evident you cannot see what you are doing -

OEDIPUS

Why, old one? Before the gods, enlighten me!

MESSENGER

If it was because of that, that you avoided returning to your home.

OEDIPUS

Yes, out of respect for Phoebus so that what he explained could not be fulfilled.

MESSENGER

A defilement brought to you by they who planted you?

OEDIPUS

That, Elder, is the thing I have always feared.

MESSENGER

Then you should know that there is nothing to make you tremble.

OEDIPUS

Nothing? Why - if I was the child born to them?

MESSENGER

Because you and Polybus are not kin by blood.

OEDIPUS

Are you saying that Polybus did not sire me?

MESSENGER

The same as but no more than this man, here!

OEDIPUS

How can he who sired me be the same as he who did not?

MESSENGER

Because he did not beget you - as I did not.

OEDIPUS

But then why did he name me as his son?

MESSENGER

Know that you were accepted from my hands as a gift.

OEDIPUS

And he strongly loved what came from the hand of another?

MESSENGER

He was persuaded because before then he was without children.

OEDIPUS

When I was given to him - had you purchased or begotten me?

MESSENGER

You were found in a forest valley on Cithaeron.

OEDIPUS

And why were you travelling in that region?

MESSENGER

I was there to oversee the mountain sheep.

OEDIPUS

A shepherd - who wandered in search of work?

MESSENGER

Yes - and that season the one who, my son, was your saviour.

OEDIPUS

What ailment possessed me when you took me into your hands?

MESSENGER

The joints of your feet are evidence of it.

OEDIPUS

What makes you speak of that old defect?

MESSENGER

I undid what held and pierced your ankles.

OEDIPUS

A strange disgrace - to carry such a token with me.

MESSENGER

Such was the fortune that named you who you are.

OEDIPUS

Before the gods, tell me whether that thing was done by my father or my mother.

MESSENGER

I do not know - he who gave you to me would be the best judge of that.

OEDIPUS

What? From someone else? Then it was not by chance you found me?

MESSENGER

No - another shepherd gave you to me.

OEDIPUS

Who was it? Can you point him out? Tell whom you saw?

MESSENGER

He was perhaps named among those of Laius.

OEDIPUS

He who once and long ago was King of this land?

MESSENGER

Yes - that man was his shepherd.

OEDIPUS

Is he then still living? Is it possible for me to see him?

MESSENGER

You who are of this region would know that best.

OEDIPUS

Is there among you here, anyone

Whoever he might be, who knows this shepherd he speaks of

Or who has seen him either here or in the wilds?

If so, declare it - for here is the opportunity to find out about these things.

CHORUS

I believe he is that one in the wilds

Whom you saught before to see.

But it is Jocasta - for certain - who could tell of him.

OEDIPUS

My lady - do you know if it is he who, before,

We desired to return to here? Is that the one about whom this person speaks?

JOCASTA

The one he spoke about? Why? Do not return to it

Nor even desire to attend again to this idle talk!

OEDIPUS

It could never be that I would fail to grasp

These proofs which will shed light upon my origin.

JOCASTA

Before the gods! If you value your own life,

Do not seek that. I have enough pain now.

OEDIPUS

Have courage - for even if my three mothers past

Were shown to be three slaves, you would not be the one exposed as low-born.

JOCASTA

I beseech you to be persuaded by me. Do not do this.

OEDIPUS

I cannot be persuaded not to learn of this for certain.

JOCASTA

Yet my judgement is for your good - it is said for the best.

OEDIPUS

This "for the best" pained me before and does so again.

JOCASTA

You, the unlucky one - may you never find out who you are.

OEDIPUS

Someone go and bring that Shepherd here to me,
For she can still rejoice in her distinguished origins.

JOCASTA

You are doomed: this and this alone will I
Say to you - and nothing hereafter!

[Exit Jocasta]

CHORUS

Why, Oedipus, has your lady gone, taken away
By some wild affliction? I am in awe
Of a misfortune bursting forth because of her silence about this.

OEDIPUS

It is necessary that it does burst forth. However lowly
My seed may be, it is my wish to know about it.
Although she is a woman, she has a mature judgement -
But even so, perhaps she is ashamed of my low-born origins.
But I - who apportion myself a child of the goddess, Fortuna,
She of beneficence - will not become dishonoured,
For She was the mother who gave me birth: my kinsfolk
The moons which separated my greatness and my lowness.
As this is the nature of my being, I cannot ever go away from it
To another, and so not learn about my birth.

CHORUS

If indeed I am a prophet or skillful in reason,
Then - by Olympus! - you shall not be without the experience,
O Cithaeron, on the rising of the full moon,

Of me exalting you - the kinsfolk of Oedipus,
His mother and provider - by my choral-dance
Since a joy has been brought to my King.
Phoebus - I invoke you, that this may also be pleasing to you!

Who, my son, of those whose living in years is long,
Did the mountain-wanderer Pan come down upon
To be your father? Or was it Loxias who slept with a woman?
For agreeable to him are all those who inhabit the wilds!
Or perhaps it was he who is the sovereign of Cyllene:
Or he the mountain-summit dwelling god of those Bacchinites
Who gladly received you who was found by one of those Helicon Nymphs
With whom he so often plays!

OEDIPUS

If it fitting for me - who has never had dealings with him -
To make an estimate, Elders, then I believe I see that Shepherd
Whom we saught before. For his great age
Would conform and be in accord with that of this man.
Also, those who are escorting him are servants
Of my own family. But, about this, your experience
Has the advantage over mine since you have seen that Shepherd before.

CHORUS

I see him clearly - and, yes, I know him. For if Laius ever had

A faithful Shepherd, it was this man.

[Enter Shepherd]

OEDIPUS

You, the stranger from Corinth, I question you first -

Is this he whom you talked about.

MESSENGER

Indeed - you behold him.

OEDIPUS

You there, old man! Here, look at me, and answer

My questions. Did you once belong to Laius?

SHEPHERD

Yes - nourished by him, not purchased as a slave.

OEDIPUS

What work did you share in or was your livelihood?

SHEPHERD

For the greater part, my living was the way of a shepherd.

OEDIPUS

And in what region did you mostly dwell with them?

SHEPHERD

It was Cithaeron - and also neighbouring regions.

OEDIPUS

This man here - did you ever observe him there and come to know him?

SHEPHERD

Doing what? Which is the man you speak of?

OEDIPUS

This one, standing there. Did you have dealings with him?

SHEPHERD

Not as I recall - so as to speak about now.

MESSENGER

That is no wonder, your Lordship. But I shall bring light
Upon those things which are now unknown. For well do I know
That he will see again that region of Cithaeron when he
With a double flock and I with one
Were neighbours and comrades for three entire six month

Durations from Spring to Arcturus.
Then for the Winter I would drive mine to my stables
And he, his, to the pens of Laius.

Was this, of which I have spoken, done or not as I have spoken?

SHEPHERD

Your words disclose it - although it is from long ago.

MESSENGER

Well, now say you know that you offered me a boy,
A nursling to rear as my own.

SHEPHERD

What do you mean? What do you ask me for?

MESSENGER

This, sir, is he who was that youngster!

SHEPHERD

May misfortune come to you! Why do you not keep silent?

OEDIPUS

You - old man. Do not restrain him for it is your speech
Which should be more restrained, not his.

SHEPHERD

Most noble Lord - what is my fault?

OEDIPUS

In not telling of the child he asked about.

SHEPHERD

But he speaks without looking as he toils without an aim.

OEDIPUS

If you will not speak as a favour, you will when you cry-out.

SHEPHERD

Before the gods, do not strike someone who is old.

OEDIPUS

Swiftly, one of you, twist his hands behind his back.

SHEPHERD

You unlucky one! What more do you desire to learn from me?

OEDIPUS

Did you give him that child he asked about?

SHEPHERD

I did. And it would have been to my advantage to die that day.

OEDIPUS

It will come to that if your words are not true.

SHEPHERD

Yet much more will be destroyed if I do speak.

OEDIPUS

This man, it seems, pushes for a delay.

SHEPHERD

I do not. Just now I said I gave him.

OEDIPUS

Taken from where? Your abode - or from that of another?

SHEPHERD

Not from my own; I received him from someone.

OEDIPUS

Who - of these clansmen here? From whose dwelling?

SHEPHERD

Your lordship, before the gods do not ask me more.

OEDIPUS

You die if I have to put that question to you again.

SHEPHERD

Then - it was one of those fathered by Laius.

OEDIPUS

From a slave? Or born from one of his own race?

SHEPHERD

Ah! Here before me is what I dread. Of speaking it...

OEDIPUS

And I, of hearing it, although hear it I must.

SHEPHERD

It was said to be his own child. But of these things,
It is your lady - who is within - who could best speak of them.

OEDIPUS

Why? Because she gave it to you?

SHEPHERD

Indeed, Lord.

OEDIPUS

Why did she want that?

SHEPHERD

So it would be destroyed.

OEDIPUS

How grievous for she who bore the child!

SHEPHERD

Yes - but she dreaded divine prophecies of ill-omen.

OEDIPUS

Which were?

SHEPHERD

The word was that he would kill his parents.

OEDIPUS

Then why did you let this elderly one take him.

MESSENGER

Because, your lordship, of mercy - so that to another land
He might fittingly convey it: to where he himself came from.

But he saved him for this mighty wound. If then you are
The one he declares you to be, know how unlucky was your birth!

OEDIPUS

Ah! All that was possible has, with certainty, passed away.
You - daylight - I now look my last at what I behold by you:
I, exposed as born from those who should not have borne me -
As having been intimate with those I should not, and killed those I should not.

[Exit Oedipus, Shepherd and Messenger]

CHORUS

You descendants of mortals -
I count your zest as being equivalent to nothing,
For where is the person
Who has won more from a lucky daimon
Than just that appearance of fame
Which later is peeled away?
Yours - your daimon, Oedipus the unlucky -
We hold as an example
That nothing mortal is favoured.

For, O Zeus, it was beyond the bounds of others
That he shot his arrow to win
An all-prospering lucky daimon:
He who in destroying that virginal chantress of oracles
With the curved claws,
Arose in my country as a defence against death.
And who since then has been called my Lord

And greatly honoured as the chief of Thebes the magnificent!

But now - who has heard of a greater misfortune?

Who is there so savagely ruined that he dwells with such troubles

With his life so changed?

Alas - Oedipus, the renowned!

A mature haven

Was enough for you

As child and father when you fell upon

That woman in her inner chamber!

How, how could what your father pushed into

Have the vigour for you for so long and in silence?

Chronos, the all-seeing, has found you, beyond your own will,

For long ago it was determined that from that marriage which was no marriage

Those children who have been born were the children that would be born.

But - as being the son of Laius,

I wish, I wish that I had never known this.

For I lament, and my cry is above all the others

As it comes forth from my mouth.

To speak straight: you gave me breath again

But I allowed my eyes to sleep.

[Enter Second Messenger]

MESSENGER

You who in this land have always been esteemed the most!
What deeds you are to hear - what behold! - and how much grief
Will weigh upon you if, on fidelity to your origins,
Your concern is still for the family of Labdacus!
For, alas, neither the Ister nor the Phasis
Can wash clean these chambers, so much suffering
Do they conceal - soon to be exposed to the light
As willed, not done outside the aid of will. Those injuries
Which bring the most grieving, are those shown to be of our own choice.

CHORUS

What I knew before could not fail to make my grieving
Anything but grave; after that - what could you announce?

MESSENGER

What is a quick tale to say
And to understand: the divinity, Jocasta, is dead.

CHORUS

A misfortune! From what cause?

MESSENGER

By she herself. But, of those events,
What was most painful is not for you - for you did not view them.
Yet - as long as my Muse is with me -
You can learn of the sufferings of her fate.

She - coloured by emotion - passed within the hall
To run straight to that bridal-bed of hers
Tearing at her hair with the fingers of both her hands.
Then, she went within - thrusting the doors closed -
To invoke Laius, he who long ago was a corpse,
Recalling that seed she received long ago by which
He was killed, to leave her to produce
Unlucky children from his own begotten child.
She lamented the bed of her double misfortune:
From her husband, a husband - and children from that child.

How, after that, she perished, I did not see
For with a war-cry Oedipus pushed in - and, because of him,
We did not behold the end of her suffering.
To him, we looked as he ploughed around
For wildly he ranged about, demanding his spear,
His lady who was not his lady, and where he might find that maternal
Double-womb which produced he himself and his children.
He was frenzied, and a daimon guided him -
For it was no man who was standing nearby -

And with a fearful shout - as if someone led the way -
He was propelled into those double-doors and, from their supports,
Bent those hollow barriers to fall into her chamber.

And there we beheld that lady suspended
In the swinging braided cords by which she had stricken herself.
He, seeing this, with a fearful roar of grief
Let down the cords which suspended her. Then when she the unfortunate
Was lain on the ground, there was something dreadful to behold:
For he tore from her those gold brooches
With which she had adorned herself
And raised them to assault his own circular organs,
Speaking such as this: that they would not have sight of
Those troubles he had suffered or had caused
But would henceforth and in darkness have sight of what
They should not and what he himself should not have had knowledge of.
Then with a awesome lament not once but frequently
He raised them to strike into his eyes. At each, blood
From his eyes dropped to his beard, not releasing blood
Drop by drop - but all at once:
A dark storm hailing drops of blood.

From those two has this burst forth - not on one
But on that man and his lady, joined by these troubles.

That old prosperity anciently theirs was indeed once
A worthy prosperity - but now, on this day, there is
Lamentation, misfortune, death, disgrace, and of all those troubles
That exist and which have names, there is not one which is not here.

CHORUS

Does he who suffers now rest from injury?

MESSENGER

He shouts for the barriers to be opened to expose
To all who are of Cadmus, this patricide,
This mother... - I will not say the profanity he speaks -
So he can cast himself from this land, and not remain
For this dwelling to become cursed because of his curse.

But he requires strength and a guide
For too great for him to carry is that burden
Which he will make known to you. You will behold a spectacle
Which even those to whom it is horrible, will make lament for.

[Enter the blind Oedipus]

CHORUS

How strange for mortals to see such an accident as this!
It is the strangest thing of all ever

To come before me. You - who suffer this -
What fury came upon you? What daimon
With great leaps from a great height
Came upon you bringing such an unfortunate fate?
I lament for your bad-luck.
Though I am not able to look at you -
There is much I wish to ask, much to understand,
Much to know
Even though I am here, shivering.

OEDIPUS

I am in agony!
To where, in my misery, am I carried? To where
Is my voice conveyed as it flees from me?
You - that daimon! To where have you brought me?

CHORUS

Somewhere strange with nothing to be heard and nothing to be seen.

OEDIPUS

Nothing announced the arrival of this dark cloud shrouding me!

Something unconquerable - brought by an unfavourable wind.
As one do the stings of those goads,
And the recalling of those troubles, pierce me!

CHORUS

It is no surprise that because of such injuries
You endure a double mourning and a double misfortune.

OEDIPUS

My friend!
You, at least, are my steadfast comrade
Because you have the endurance to attend to the blind.
For you are not hidden from me - I clearly know,
Even in this darkness, that it is your voice.

CHORUS

You of strange deeds - how did you bear
To so extinguish your sight? What daimon carried you away?

OEDIPUS

It was Apollo - Apollo, my friend,
Who brought such troubles to such a troubled end.
But it was my own hand, and no other, which made the assault -
I, who suffer this. For why should I have sight

When there was nothing pleasing to see?

CHORUS

These things are as you have said they are.

OEDIPUS

Who could I behold?
Who could be loved - or whose greeting,
My friend, would be delightful to hear?
So, and swiftly, send me away from this place.
Send away, my friend, this great pest -
This bringer of a curse: the mortal whom our gods
Detest the most.

CHORUS

You are as helpless in that resolve as you were in your misfortune:
Thus I wish you had never come to know of those things!

OEDIPUS

May death come to whosoever while roaming those grasslands loosened
Those cruel fetters and so safely pulled me away from death!
For it was not a favourable deed.
For had I died then no grief such as this
Would have been caused to either me or my kin.

CHORUS

I also wish that.

OEDIPUS

I would not, then, have shed the blood of my father
As I journeyed, and not be named by mortals
As the husband of she who gave me my birth.
I am without a god - an unconsecrated child -
And now of the same kind as he who gave me this miserable existence!
If there is a trouble which is even older than these troubles,
Then it will be the lot of Oedipus.

CHORUS

I do not know if I could say that your intentions were right,
For it is perhaps better to no longer exist than to live, blind.

OEDIPUS

But as to this being done for the best -
You should not instruct me, nor offer me more advice.
For, if I had eyes, I would not know where to look
When I went to Hades and saw my father
Or my unfortunate mother, since to both
I have done what is so outstanding that a strangling is excluded.
Perhaps the sight of children is desirable:
To behold how those buds are mine will grow -
But it would certainly not be to these eyes of mine.
Nor would that of this town, or its towers, or the sacrifices
Offered to daimons. For it was most unfortunate that I -
Who as no one else in Thebes prospered most excellently -
Bereaved myself of such things by my own declaration
That everyone must push aside the profane one - the one the gods
Have exposed as unclean and of the clan of Laius.
After I have made known this, my stain,
How could I look those here straight in the eye?
Certainly I could not. And if what is heard could be blocked out
At that source in my ears, I would not have held myself back
From this miserable body and thus would be blind and also hear nothing!
For it is pleasing to dwell away from concern about injury.

Why, Cithaeron - why did you receive me, and having accepted,
Not directly kill me so I would never make known
To mortals whence I was born?

O Polybus and Corinth - and you that others called the ancient clan-home
Of my ancestors - I, the beauty that you reared
Had bad wounds festering underneath!
For I am found to be defective having been defective from my birth.

You three routes and concealed valley,
You grove and narrow place of the three-fold paths:
You took in from my hands that blood which was my father's
But also mine - so perhaps you can still recall
Those deeds that I did there, and then, when here,
What I also achieved? You - those rites of joy
Which gave me my birth and which planted me anew
By the same seed being shot up to manifest fathers,
Brothers, sons - the blood of a kinsman -
Brides, wives, mothers: as much shame
As can arise from deeds among mortals.

No one should speak about things they do not favour doing.
Swiftly then - before the gods and beyond here -
Hide me away or kill me or upon the sea cast me
So that you will never look upon me again.
Come, and dignify this unhappy man by your touch.
Be persuaded - do not fear. For this misfortune is mine alone
And no mortal except me can bear it.

[Enter Creon]

CHORUS

As to this request of yours - it is fitting that here is Creon
To act and give advice,
For he alone is left to be guardian of this region in your place.

OEDIPUS

But what is there than I can say to him?
What trust can with fairness be shown to me?
For I am discovered as being false to him, previously, in everything.

CREON

I did not come here, Oedipus, to laugh
Nor to blame you for your previous error.

[Creon turns to speak to the crowd who have gathered]

You - there - even if you do not honour those descended from mortals,
Have respect for the all-nourishing flames of the Lord Helios
So that this stain is not looked upon when it is uncovered -
This which neither our soil nor the sacred waters
Nor daylight will welcome.
Swiftly now take him into his chambers:
For the most proper conduct is that only kinfolk
Look at and hear a kinsman's faults.

OEDIPUS

Before the gods - since you have torn from me a dread
By you coming here - you, the most noble - to me, a most ignoble man,
Yield me something. I say this not for myself, but for you.

CREON

What favour do you request so earnestly?

OEDIPUS

That you throw me from this land as swiftly as you can
To where it is known there will be not one mortal to greet me.

CREON

Know that this would certainly have been done - were it not necessary
For me first to learn from the god what I should do.

OEDIPUS

But his saying was completely clear -
That I, the disrespectful one, the patricide, must depart.

CREON

Those were the words - but since our needs have changed

It is better to learn what must be done.

OEDIPUS

But you will enquire of behalf of this unhappy man?

CREON

Yes - as you should now pay tribute to the god.

OEDIPUS

Certainly - and I rely on you for this supplication:
That you give to she who is within, a tomb such as you might desire
To lay yourself in - for it is correct to so perform this on behalf of your own.
As for me - never once let it be deemed fitting, while I happen to live,
For this my father's town to have me within it.
Instead, let me dwell in the mountains - to where is Cithaeron
Renowned because of me; for my mother and my father
While they lived appointed it the tomb I would lay in.
Thus, there I will depart, killed as they desired.
Yet I do know that neither a sickness
Nor anything similar will destroy me, for I would never have been saved
From that death unless it was for some horrible injury.
Hence I shall await that destiny which is mine - whatever its nature.

As for my sons - do not, Creon, add them
To your care. For they are men, and therefore will never
Lack the ability - wherever they are - to survive.
But as for those unfortunate ones, my girls
For whom my table of food was never separate from
Nor who were ever without me, so that whatever I touched
Would be shared between us -
Attend to them, for me.
Would that you could let my hands touch them
And they lament for my injuries.
Let these things be, Lord -
Let them be so, you of this noble race.
For if my hands could reach them
I would believe they were mine just as when I had my sight.

[Enter Antigone and Ismene]

What is this?
Before the gods! - Do I not hear those whom I love,
Weeping? Has Creon let them make lament for me,
Sending here those who are dearest to me - my daughters?
Is this right?

CREON

It is right. For I prepared this for you.
I conjectured this - your present delight - since it has possessed you before.

OEDIPUS

Then good fortune to you on your path -
And may you be guarded by a better daimon than was my fate!

My children - where are you? Come here - here
To these my hands of he who is your brother:
These of he who planted you and which assisted your father
To see in this way with what before were clear eyes.
He, my children, who sees nothing, who enquires about nothing -
He who is exposed as fathering you from where he himself was sown.
Even though I cannot behold you, I lament for you
Because I know of the bitter life left to you
Which mortals will cause you to live.
For what gathering of townsfolk could you go to?
What festivals - from where you would not return, lamenting,
To your dwelling instead of watching the spectacle?
And when you become ripe for marriage
Who is there who exists, my children, who would chance it -
Accepting the rebukes that will as painful for they who begat me
As they will be for you?

For what injury is not here? Your father killed his father;
He seeded her who had brought him forth
And from where he himself was sown
You were born - in the same way he himself was acquired.

Such as this will you be rebuked with. Who then will marry you?
Such a person does not exist. No, my children, it is without doubt
That you must go to waste unsown and unmarried.

Son of Menoeceus! You are the only father
Who is left to them, for we who planted them are destroyed:
Both of us. Watch that they do not wander
As beggars, without a man, since they are of your family -
Or that they become the equal of me in misfortune.
Rather, favour them because you see them at such an age as this,
Deserted by everyone - except for yourself.
Agree to this, noble lord, and touch me with your hand.
And you, my children - had you judgement, I would even now
Have given you much advice. As it is, let your supplication be
To live where it is allowed and to obtain a life more agreeable
Than that of the father who planted you.

CREON

Let this abundance of lamentation pass away - and go into those chambers.

OEDIPUS

I shall obey, although it is not pleasing.

CREON

All fine things have their season.

OEDIPUS

Do you know my conditions for going?

CREON

Speak them - and I, having heard them, will know.

OEDIPUS

Send me far from this land.

CREON

That gift comes from the gods.

OEDIPUS

But the gods must detest me!

CREON

Then swiftly will your wish be fulfilled.

OEDIPUS

But do you grant this?

CREON

I have no desire to speak idly about things I cannot judge.

OEDIPUS

Then now lead me from here.

CREON

Move away from your children - and go.

OEDIPUS

But do not take them from me.

CREON

Do not desire to be master in all things:

For you are without the strength which assisted you during your life.

CHORUS

You who dwell in my fatherland, Thebes, observe - here is Oedipus,

He who understood that famous enigma and was a strong man:

What clansman did not behold that fortune without envy?

But what a tide of problems have come over him!

Therefore, look toward that ending which is for us mortals

To observe that particular day - calling no one lucky until,

Without the pain of injury, they are conveyed beyond life's ending.

Appendix

v.34: '*Daimons*'. Correctly understood, a 'daimon' is what we would now call a 'supernatural being'. Daimons guard or watch over individuals, and thus guide the Destiny of the individual: they also give the individual their 'genius' (or their natural abilities). A daimon can be either positive or negative in the personal sense - that is, it can bring good or bad luck and thus good fortune or misfortune. A daimon, in effect, is seen as doing the work or the will of the gods.

Further, daimons also guard or watch over particular places - particularly those natural, sacred sites and places where the daimon thus becomes a 'nature spirit'. Daimons also guard and watch over families, dwellings, clans, towns and their citadels.

It is important to understand that daimons are not 'demons' - demons are the creations of an abstract moralizing religion like Christianity which posits an abstract 'evil' and an abstract 'good'.

v.981-2:

This is one of the crucial lines in understanding how Sophocles - and the Greeks themselves - viewed what we call the 'incest' of Oedipus with his mother (importantly, the Greeks had no word for 'incest'). On a first reading of the Greek text, it gives the impression that what is meant is: "many are the

mortals who already - *in dreams also* - have lain with their mothers..." That is, while it is disrespectful and a disgrace, it is nothing to seriously concern oneself with.

Of course, this is far too 'amoral' for most translators and scholars to even consider, and so the line is taken as meaning: "many are the mortals who in dreams (and also in prophecies) have lain with their mothers..." This sense is rather strained, and not apparent on first reading the Greek.

However, if moral Christianized abstractions are not read into the *Oedipus Tyrannus* - as nearly all previous translators have done, often from laziness and sometimes from misunderstanding what the Greek means - then what emerges, if for purpose of argument we accept the above interpretation, is that the incest may not be that important. Thus, what concerns Oedipus most is his killing of his father - all he says about the incest is that he "should not" have slept with his mother and it is disrespectful (for example, qv. v.1184f and v.1441). What has brought about the plague which is devastating the clan of Thebes, is the killing of Laius. Furthermore, the offender has not given tributes to the gods to clean his hands of the bloodstain (qv. v.1445 - which is often overlooked or misinterpreted). That is, the pollution caused by the killing has not been purified by offerings to the gods - and thus the offender has offended the gods.
